

The Daily Tribune News

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UGA Football



FRIDAY, JANUARY 28, 2022

# Georgia celebrates title, looks ahead to '22 season

By PAUL NEWBERRY  
AP Sports Writer

Kirby Smart learned from his former boss that the time for celebrating is short in college football.

Even while he reveled Jan. 11 in the hang-over from Georgia's first national title since 1980, the coach was already thinking about what comes next.

"The wind blows a lot stronger at the top," Smart said. "I've seen it."

Indeed, he has.

Smart worked nine seasons at Alabama under Nick Saban, helping win four national titles.

Now, he's got one of his own after Georgia rallied for a 33-18 victory over Saban and the Crimson Tide in the championship game Jan. 10.

The long-overdue party stretched from Indianapolis all the way back to Athens, Georgia,

where fans and students stormed the streets in a raucous celebration.

But Smart's time with Saban taught him that he's already a bit behind on the 2022 season.

"I know people don't understand it, but other teams are 10 days up on you because they finished January 1st," Smart said. "Fortunately, I had a really good mentor and teacher in dealing with that because he's in it every year. But you fall behind because you're trying to manage your roster."

Smart is already concerned about complacency seeping into a team that will spend the entire offseason hearing how great it is.

He doesn't want the Bulldogs to go another 41 years without a championship.

"I don't know that our team that's coming back is prepared for what they're about to see because there's a sense of entitlement, there's a sense of the disease, that has always crept in at Georgia," Smart said bluntly of his alma mater.

"There's a huge anointment and entitlement



DARRON CUMMINGS/AP

Georgia head coach Kirby Smart celebrates with Stetson Bennett after the College Football Playoff Championship Game against Alabama Jan. 10 in Indianapolis.

that can affect your program. So now it turns number of key players, especially on the defensive side. for us to ... what we've got to do to keep it going."

Smart knows that he'll have to replace a

SEE CELEBRATION, PAGE 4

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# SEASON AT A GLANCE

## Schedule and Results

### Regular Season

Georgia 10, Clemson 3 | Sept. 4, 2021 | Charlotte, North Carolina

Georgia 56, UAB 7 | Sept. 11, 2021 | Athens, Georgia

Georgia 40, South Carolina 13 | Sept. 18, 2021 | Athens, Georgia

Georgia 62, Vanderbilt 0 | Sept. 25, 2021 | Nashville, Tennessee

Georgia 37, Arkansas 0 | Oct. 2, 2021 | Athens, Georgia

Georgia 34, Auburn 10 | Oct. 9, 2021 | Auburn, Alabama

Georgia 30, Kentucky 13 | Oct. 16, 2021 | Athens, Georgia

Georgia 34, Florida 7 | Oct. 30, 2021 | Jacksonville, Florida

Georgia 43, Missouri 6 | Nov. 6, 2021 | Athens, Georgia

Georgia 41, Tennessee 17 | Nov. 13, 2021 | Knoxville, Tennessee

Georgia 56, Charleston Southern 7 | Nov. 20, 2021 | Athens, Georgia

Georgia 45, Georgia Tech 0 | Nov. 27, 2021 | Atlanta

### SEC Championship Game

Alabama 41, Georgia 24 | Dec. 4, 2021 | Atlanta

### College Football Playoff

Georgia 34, Michigan 11 | Dec. 31, 2021 | Orange Bowl (Semifinal) | Miami

Georgia 33, Alabama 18 | Jan. 10, 2022 | National Championship | Indianapolis

## Statistical Leaders

### Offense

PASSING: Stetson Bennett | 185 completions | 2,862 yards | 29 TD passes

RUSHING: Zamir White | 160 total carries | 856 yards | 11 TD carries

RECEIVING: Brock Bowers | 56 total receptions | 882 yards | 13 TD receptions

### Defense

TOTAL TACKLES: Lewis Cine | 73 tackles | 43 solo | 30 assists

TOTAL SACKS: Robert Beal Jr. | 6.5 sacks | 23 total tackles | 19 QB hits

TOTAL INTERCEPTIONS: Derion Kendrick | 4 INTs | 41 tackles | 3 pass breakups

### Special Teams

FIELD GOALS: Jack Podlesny | 22 FGs made | 27 FG attempts | 81.5% accuracy

PUNTS: Jake Camarada | 47 punts | 2,197 yards | 46.74-yard average

RETURNS: Kearis Jackson | 28 total returns | 189 PR yards | 116 KR yards

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## Celebration

### From Page 2

Nose tackle Jordan Davis, linebacker Nakobe Dean and end Travon Walker all have a shot at going in the first round of the NFL draft. Tackle Devonte Wyatt, cornerback Derion Kendrick, and linebackers Channing Tindall and Quay Walker are expected to move on as well.

On the offensive side, running back James Cook and linemen Jamaree Salyer and Justin Shaffer have their sights on the pros. Receiver George Pickens missed much of the season with a knee injury, but he also could be headed to the NFL draft.

Smart has several players who plan to enter the transfer portal, though they held off on making their decisions public until after the national championship game.

Finally, Georgia is still putting the finishing touches on another stellar recruiting class.

“We don’t know how many spots we have because we don’t know what some guys are doing,” Smart said. “There’s a lot of work to be done.”

The most intriguing position is quarterback.

Stetson Bennett, a former walk-on who took over the starting job after J.T. Daniels was injured, is a fifth-year senior but does have another year of eligibility because of COVID-19.

Daniels, a former top recruit who transferred to Georgia from Southern California after the 2019 season, also has an extra year of eligibility remaining. Further down the depth chart are Carson Beck and Brock Vandagriff, soon to be joined by 2022 signee Gunner Stockton.

Daniels has again entered the transfer portal as he seeks a new school for his final year of eligibility.

Bennett, the offensive MVP of both the Orange Bowl semifinal and the national championship game, isn’t regarded as a top NFL prospect, and decided to come back for a sixth season.

Bennett, who carried a flip phone and avoided social media during the 2021 season, made an exception to his policy by posting the words “One More Year” on his Instagram account on Jan. 19.

Bennett will take advantage of the NCAA’s “Super Senior” rule to use the added year of eligibility granted in 2020 because of the pandemic.

It helps the team extend its championship celebration.

The Bulldogs certainly earned it, knocking off college football’s greatest dynasty and the coach generally considered the best to ever walk the sideline.

“Bama is a world-class caliber team,” said safety Lewis Cine, the defensive MVP of the national championship game. “We knew that Bama has always been at the top. And to beat the team at the top is something really surreal.

“It’s something that goes down in history and something that I’ll remember forever.”



CURTIS COMPTON/ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION VIA AP  
Georgia wide receiver Adonai Mitchell, left, catches the go-ahead touchdown against Alabama defensive back Khyree Jackson to take a 19-18 lead in the fourth quarter of the College Football Playoff Championship Game Jan. 10 in Indianapolis. Mitchell, a freshman, finished with two catches for 50 yards in a 33-18 victory. The 40-yard touchdown reception proved to be Mitchell’s longest catch of the season.

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# Column: Bulldogs wipe away 41 years of frustration

By PAUL NEWBERRY  
AP Sports Columnist

After 41 agonizing years, the Georgia Bulldogs were not about to let another championship slip through their fingers.

Not even after a bizarre fumble and recovery handed Alabama a go-ahead touchdown with just over 10 minutes to go in the national title game Jan. 10 in Indianapolis.

The gritty Bulldogs and their undersized quarterback, the former walk-on known as “The Mailman,” finally delivered a national championship to the red-and-black faithful.

The fact that they did it against Nick Saban and the mighty Crimson Tide, the team that had dished out one heartache after another to the Dawgs, only made the triumph that much sweeter.

And on top of the Atlanta Braves winning a World Series? Suddenly, a city and state that has known so much sporting misery can call itself Winnersville, U.S.A.

Let the party begin!  
Again.



BEN GRAY/AP

Fans celebrate winning the title at the University of Georgia's coliseum in Athens.

“I felt like I got hit by a train,” quipped Georgia safety Lewis Cine, the game’s defensive MVP, at a morning-after news conference fol-

lowing a very short night.

The final was 33-18 — a deceiving score for a game that was an ugly, old-school battle of

field goals for nearly three quarters.

It was a thing of beauty for the Bulldogs.

“I tell you what, there’s gonna be some property torn up in Indianapolis tonight,” coach Kirby Smart screamed after giving a big smooch to the championship trophy, harkening up the celebratory words once spoken by Georgia’s late radio play-by-play man, Larry Munson.

That wasn’t the only gesture tying together all the years since Georgia’s last national title.

Smart embraced 89-year-old Vince Doolley, the coach of that previous title team, who had only recently recovered from a bout with COVID-19 before making the trek to Indianapolis.

They’re both championship coaches now.

Smart earned his trophy with a dominant defense — which bounced back resoundingly from a 41-24 beating delivered by Alabama in the Southeastern Conference championship game — and a much-debated decision to stick with Stetson Bennett as his quarterback instead of the more heralded J.T. Daniels.

SEE BULLDOGS, PAGE 6

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CURTIS COMPTON/ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION VIA AP

Georgia head coach Kirby Smart kisses the trophy while his players, from left, Zamir White, Jamaree Salyer, Nakobe Dean and Stetson Bennett celebrate on stage after winning the College Football Playoff Championship Game over Alabama Jan. 10 in Indianapolis. The Bulldogs' victory over the Crimson Tide exorcised a lot of demons, including avenging a loss to the Nick Saban-led program in the title game four years ago.

## Bulldogs

From Page 5

Alabama led 9-6 until Zamir White scored the first touchdown of the night on a 1-yard run, sending the Bulldogs to the final period up 13-9.

After 'Bama's fourth field goal made it a one-point game, the Tide caught a huge break.

It was the sort of play that snake-bit Georgia had come to expect over the years, as every attempt to win its first national title since 1980 was turned away.

Under heavy pressure, Bennett tried to throw the ball away. But it slipped off his fingertips a split-second before his right arm came forward, making it a fumble.

Everyone in the stadium thought it was an incomplete pass, even Alabama's Brian Branch, who nonchalantly collected the wobbling ball in his arms just before he stepped out of bounds.

The officials upheld their fumble call after a lengthy video review.

Alabama quickly scored its first touchdown of the game. Just like that, the Tide was back in front 18-13, and every Georgia fan — from Indianapolis all the way back to the Peach State — was surely envisioning how they'd be moaning about that crazy play over stiff drinks in the days and weeks and years to come.

Only, these Bulldogs wrote a different ending. This time, it's champagne all around.

Bennett, who originally walked on at Georgia and even spent a year playing at a junior college, justified Smart's faith after his big mistake.

"Our defense played such a great game," Bennett said. "I wasn't going to be the reason we lost the game."

With fire in his eyes, the fifth-year senior needed just four plays and a pass interference penalty to guide the Bulldogs on a touchdown drive that will be remembered as long as games are played between the hedges in Athens, Georgia.

The capper was a 40-yard throw to freshman Adonai Mitchell in the right corner of the end zone, putting the Bulldogs back on top to stay at 19-18 after a 2-point conversion failed.

That drive, that score, seemed to lift the cloud that has hovered over this program since its only consensus national title.

When Georgia got the ball back again, Bennett extended the lead with a 15-yard touchdown throw to another freshman, Brock Bowers.

And, finally, with Alabama and its Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback, Bryce Young, trying to muster a drive that could force overtime, Kelee Ringo picked off a pass and sped 79 yards in front of the Georgia bench for the clinching score.

SEE BULLDOGS, PAGE 8



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## Bulldogs

From Page 6

After watching five other SEC schools win a total of 15 national titles since its last championship — seven of them by Alabama, including a couple at Georgia's direct expense — the Bulldogs are back on top.

"I told our guys, 'The only way you're getting home is through them,'" Smart said, referring to Saban, his former boss, and the Tide. "And they did it."

It took far longer than anyone would have expected back in 1980.

That only made it more satisfying.

After Bennett watched Ringo's interception on the big screen — remember, the quarterback is not that tall, so he really can't see the field from the sideline — he burst into the first tears he has shed in as long as he can remember.

"It just lifted off my shoulders," Bennett said the next morning. "That was when it all hit me, the wave of emotion. I can't describe it. I wasn't expecting it. It caught me off guard."

Smart, a former Georgia defensive back, was called back to his alma mater in 2016 with an explicit charge to produce this very moment.

Nothing less than a national championship would do.

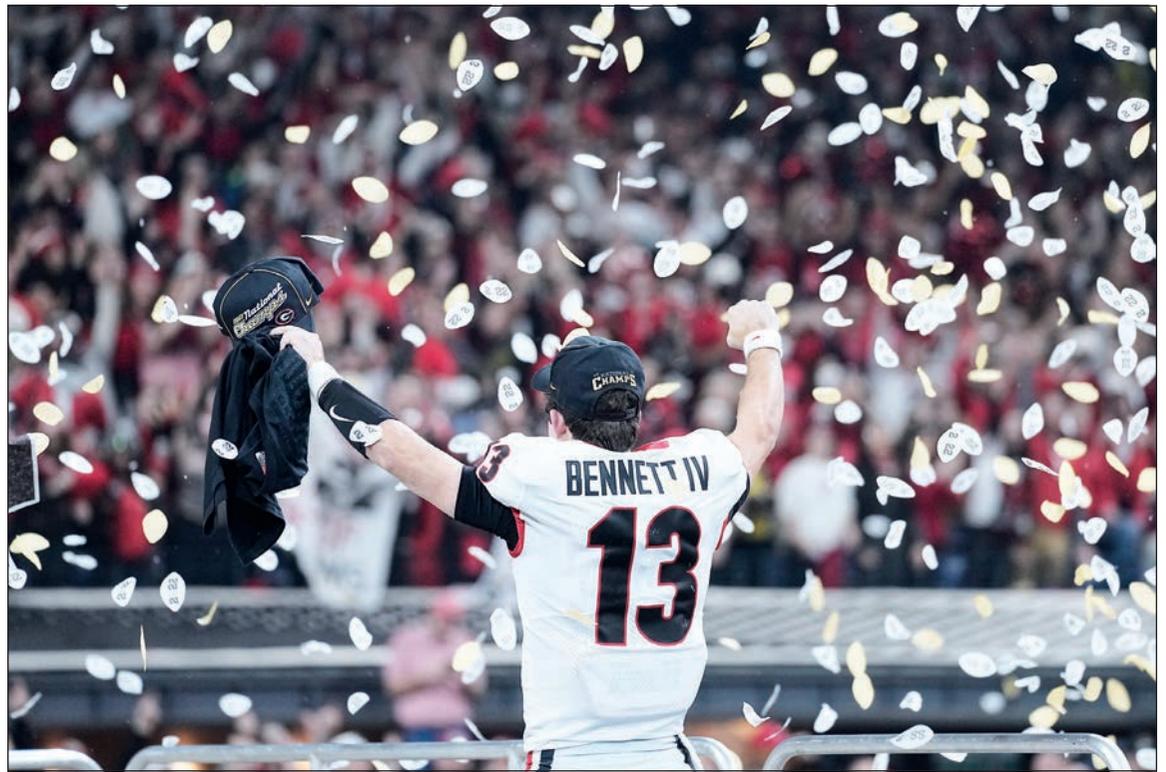
With that out of the way, Smart has no intention of requiring another 41 years to do it again. He issued a challenge to all those fans who turned Indy into Athens North.

"I just hope they remember this feeling and understand they don't need to get spoiled," Smart said. "They need to stay hungry like these players."

C'mon, Coach.

Let them be spoiled for a little while.

After 41 years, they deserve it.



PAUL SANCYA/AP

Georgia's Stetson Bennett celebrates after the College Football Playoff Championship Game against Alabama Jan. 10 in Indianapolis. The title is the first for the Bulldogs since the 1980 season.

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